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POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS AMONG THE ZULUS

By J. B. McCord, M.D., Durban, Natal

The Zulu race is today in a transition stage. Probably 90 per cent are living and thinking much as did their ancestors a hundred years ago. The 10 per cent who are coming out of the darkness are the leaders and the others will follow.

The typical Zulu, in his native heathen state, is eminently a creature of impulse. The impulse is apt to be good unless, for some reason, it happens to be otherwise. He is naturally good natured and happy, of a kindly disposition, hospitable and courteous. He is honest as to stealing, but he knows not the truth or what it is made for, though he recognizes that it is reprehensible conduct for the other fellow to lie to him. In warfare, he is brave to rashness, but he is afraid of the dark, for then is when the evil spirits walk. His superstitions are deep seated and domineering and affect his whole life and conduct. He is sometimes clean after a bath, but he is not often guilty of such an indiscretion. He is lazy by nature and drunken when there is any of his native beer available. He is hospitable by custom and so long as his food lasts he will share it with his guest. When his food is finished, he goes visiting. He loves himself and his wives and children and cattle and dogs and everything that belongs to himself. He is loyal to his chief for there is his protection. When the impulse is strong enough on him, he may be unselfishly heroic, for he is a creature of impulse. It would be rather unjust to call him immoral. He is unmoral. Morality as we think of it has never occurred to him. He lives up to his code of morals as a rule. He can't help doing so, for his code of morals is whatever he lives up to. He is warlike, excitable, reserved and

dignified; and if I knew any other contradictory adjectives I should be tempted to apply them to him to complete the description.

In dress the Zulu is an almost complete savage, a leather petticoat for the women, a belt with a fringe of monkey tails for men, and less or nothing for the children. His dwelling is primitive. His house, or hut is made of grass, supported on a frame work of interwoven sticks. In shape it is like the old-fashioned hemispherical bee-hive, with a low door on one side through which one must crawl; and without windows or chimney. He cooks his food over an open fire in the middle of his hut, and the ceiling and walls are blackened by the smoke which finds its way out through the door and through the thatch of the roof.

A kraal consists of a collection of huts, the number depending on the number of wives which the man has. Each wife has one hut for herself and her children. Each kraal consists of one family; that is, a man with all his wives and all their children and perhaps grandchildren. There may be a 100 or 150 people in one kraal.

Polygamy is one of the oldest institutions of the Zulu. A chief may have several hundred wives. The average well-to-do man will have from half a dozen to several dozen, and a man with only one wife has about the same status as a white man with only one slave had in the South before the war. The first thing a young man thinks of when reaching the adult age is the matter of matrimony. He goes away to work for the money for his first wife. After he has the first wife it is easier to get the second, for the first wife by her work assists him. After a man has procured half a dozen wives his fortune is made.

The head of the kraal and all the members of this family are supported by the gardens, which surround the kraal. Each garden consists of several acres, and the gardens are divided among the wives. Each ambitious wife endeavors to have the best garden, and to raise the best food, and prepare the best meals for the common husband. Each wife aspires to be the favorite wife.

Their food consists almost entirely of what they raise in

the gardens, supplemented by an occasional chicken or a goat, and very rarely, by other meat. Their vegetables from the gardens consist chiefly of corn, potatoes, beans, pumpkins and various native vegetables.

The young men, as a rule, do not marry until they are twenty-five or thirty years old. This is chiefly because it takes some time to get the necessary money or cattle to pay for their wives. The girls, as a rule, marry young, almost always before twenty-five and usually before twenty. It is very common for the old men to marry very young wives. This is partly because they have daughters to dispose of, and so have the wherewithal for the purchase of more wives.

The Zulus' pleasures are very largely the pleasures of the senses. He is very fond of his native beer, which is low in alcoholic strength but very high in the quantities which he drinks. Beer drinking parties are the delight of the heathen and the despair of the missionary.

He is also fond of dancing, hunting, eating, gossiping, taking snuff, and fighting. In the good old days before the British government took charge, fighting was one of his favorite occupations, and sometimes developed into a very brutal sport. In the times of Chaka, who carried on war as a business rather than a pleasure, the conquered tribe was either exterminated or incorporated into the tribe of the conqueror. But before the time of Chaka the conquered tribe usually paid a heavy ransom and returned home.

In warfare the Zulu is brave to recklessness. With his spears and his clubs he will charge the firing line of a regiment of white soldiers until he falls. He does not think about retreat.

In health and in strength the Zulu will stand among the foremost of the peoples of Africa. He is much larger and stronger than the East Indian coolie, many of whom are laborers in Natal. In the olden days a weakly child was destroyed; so that the present Zulu race is largely a result of the "survival of the fittest." Even now a weakly child will usually die in infancy, and only the more hardy individuals persist. The Zulu has great endurance and recuperative power. However, he does not often work hard for long

periods of time, and it is doubtful if he has the capacity for hard work, mental or physical, that the white man has.

Though usually strong and in good health the Zulu is still subject to sickness. This is especially true, on account of his ignorance as to the laws of health, and the rules of hygiene. Sickness is present in every large kraal almost constantly. He knows nothing of the germ theory of disease. He believes that sickness comes as a result of poison administered, or as a result of the practice of witchcraft, or from injuries inflicted. He is a firm believer in the law of *cause and effect*. The strangest sickness, in his mind, is the sickness which just came of itself.

The belief in witchcraft is universal. The idea is that certain medicines and combinations of drugs or the ashes of strange objects have an uncanny potency. These, with the aid of the spirits and goblins which they invoke, are capable of working ill to an enemy. Or perhaps they may counteract some evil which is being caused by a similar agency. The makers of these charms and medicines are looked upon as witches and wizards. The makers of the antidotes are called the witch doctors. As a rule the same person combines both professions. A native applies to the witch doctor for a charm to bring about certain results. In case of sickness he applies to him for a charm to drive away the evil spirits which are causing his trouble.

The medicine for causing sickness is administered in the food, thrown on a person's body, placed in the path over which he shall walk, or put on some article which the person will handle. However administered, the magic is potent to bring about the desired result.

The witch doctor, next to the chief, is all powerful in the tribe, as the lives and the health of the various members of the tribe depend upon his skill and his good will. He is supposed to be able to cause sickness and cure disease. He can give charms to the young man to make the right young lady fall in love with him. He can give charms to make the crops grow and the rain fall. Needless to say he is a quack and an impostor of the first order, skilled in the game of bluff, an expert in reading human nature, some-

times something of a mind reader and hypnotist, and practiced in discovering secrets, and then telling them as if they had been discovered by magic.

Contrasted with this ignorant, heathen Zulu we fortunately have the other extreme—a Christian Zulu gentleman who holds the degree of Bachelor of Arts from an American university, and a graduate of one of our theological schools. If you should go to his house you would find it as clean and neat and orderly as you could wish. His wife will invite you to a well-cooked and well-served dinner such as you get in your own home. You are received with every courtesy, and you mentally pronounce him a perfect gentleman. The assumption of equality, or superiority which is sometimes unpleasantly evident in a negro who has lifted himself above others of his race, is entirely absent. You feel that here is a case of one race offering its best courtesies to another race. Between these two extremes there are all sorts and conditions of men, grading imperceptibly from the ignorant, sensual, heathen Zulu to the Christian gentleman.

The Christian Zulus as a rule dress as do the white people, live in upright houses, marry but one wife, are more constant in work and are far more intelligent and advanced in every way than their heathen neighbors. The day schools are making deep inroads into the ranks of heathenism and ignorance. The Christian churches claim many thousand adherents, and today the hope of the Zulu race, and to a large extent of all South Africa, is the Christian and educated Zulu.

Politically the Zulu, the native of Natal, has no standing. He lives in his tribe and is ruled by his chief. The chief's power is less than formerly, but to all outward appearance the chief still rules in his tribe. Above the chief is placed the magistrate, who administers the law, collects taxes, and in general looks after the government of a number of tribes. The native has no vote, nor any voice in the selection of governor, representatives, magistrates, or any of the officials of the government.

In the tribe the land is assigned to the chief, and he in turn assigns it to his various subjects. The whole tribe may be removed by the government from one situation to another. Any individual of a tribe may be removed at the pleasure of his chief or of the magistrate from his holding to any other location. This state of affairs prevents any improvement of the land other than the mere scratching of the surface to get an immediate living. The native fears that if he plants orange trees, or banana groves around his kraal his chief, or some white man will covet it, and he will be sent away. Among the Christian natives who have come out from heathenism and their tribal relations there is a great desire to own land of their own. On the mission stations some few of the natives have acquired holdings in freehold title. Here you will see neat houses and extensive gardens and orange orchards. At present it is very difficult for a native to get a piece of land with freehold title, as the government will not sell him land and has often put great obstacles in the way of his buying land from individuals.

Probably the greatest cross which a native has to bear is the *special code of laws* which apply to him but not to the white man. He must go to the magistrate and get a pass if he wants to take a horse a few miles across country, or if he wishes to go to town to work; and when he gets to town he must get a five days pass if he wishes to visit, or he must take out a special license if he wishes to work by the day, besides a special pass to allow him to stay in town to work. There are a multitude of laws regulating his relations to employers. For many years the native has been the only inhabitant of Natal who has paid a direct tax, until within the last three years. There are multitudes of little laws regulating the native's life. As an example of the laws of trespass; a small boy about twelve years old went to see a friend. He mistook the house and entered the wrong yard. While in this yard he met a policeman. He was promptly arrested for trespass. He was taken to the magistrate and tried without an opportunity to communicate with his master and sentenced to receive ten strokes of the cane. The boy was kept in prison all night, received the

ten strokes and it was not until the next morning that his master obtained his release.

Another draw-back to this native code of laws is that it is interpreted and administered in a great many different ways by a great many different magistrates, and the native has practically no appeal from the decision of the magistrate or policeman who arrests and tries him.

This multitude of little annoying laws and regulations, many of which appear to the natives to be unjust, and which are variously administered—which also appears to the natives, to be unjust—naturally causes great discontent in their minds. When in 1906 a poll tax on all unmarried young men was imposed in addition to the other taxes, the natives resented it. They were told it was a tax on their heads, and as a rule were given no explanation, except that the government wanted the money. This led to an extensive rebellion, in the spring and summer of 1906. This rebellion resulted in the loss of large sums of money to the government, and loss of four or five thousand lives among the natives. However, it called the attention of the white population of Natal very forcibly to the native discontent. After the rebellion a commission was appointed by the government to inquire into the condition of native affairs, and the causes of the native discontent, and to bring in recommendations to remedy the difficulties. After studying the condition of the natives and hearing their grievances in all parts of Natal and Zuzuland this commission brought in its report. Its introductory remark was that the Natal government's native policy had been weighed in the balances and found wanting. After pointing out the weak points in the government's native policy the commission brought in a number of broad minded and statesmanlike recommendations. The Natal public and the natives waited patiently and expectantly for the government to take action on the report of this commission, but practically nothing was done.

After waiting some time a large number of prominent and serious minded men of Durban organized themselves into a committee for the discussion of native affairs with the idea of urging upon the government the necessity of

taking action along the lines recommended by the commission. In these discussions the Native Affairs Reform Committee have gone over many of the vital and difficult questions connected with native administration. I will speak of a few of the more prominent ones.

The question of the franchise for the native is coming more and more to the front. It is admitted by all that an unrestricted franchise for all the natives, heathen and Christian, is out of the question. The franchise for educated and property holding natives is more worthy of serious consideration. Most thinking men, however, admit that it would be desirable to give all the natives, a chance to be represented in some manner, but opinions differ as to what degree and in what manner. When the convention met which was to discuss a constitution for a union of all South Africa, the question of native franchise threatened to wreck the whole idea of union, for Cape Colony was unwilling to take the franchise from her colored voters and the other colonies were unwilling to give it to their natives. A compromise was finally effected. But most statesmen recognize that some sort of representation must be given to the natives. It seems likely that eventually the natives will have representatives in parliament who will be allowed to speak for the natives on questions affecting them, and possibly have a vote on some such questions. This however is a matter for the future. At present the Zulu has no voice whatever in the government of Natal. There has been a secretary for native affairs who has been expected to speak for the natives, and the governor has been supposed to be the supreme chief and a sort of father to native people. These have been beautiful ideals, but in practice have been most unsatisfactory. But the pressure is increasing and South African statesmen are wondering what sort of a safety valve will be cheapest and most effective.

As stated above, the relation of the native to the land is very unsatisfactory to the native. The present arrangement takes from him all ambition to make permanent improvements. This matter of land tenure for the natives is one of the questions which is occupying the minds of

thinking men in Natal. Shall the land be given to the natives in small holdings? Shall it be sold to them? Shall it be leased to them? Shall they be allowed to own land?

Many think that a large number of native land owners, with twenty or thirty acres apiece, would create a contented industrious and prosperous rural population that would be a good thing for the whole country. Others are afraid that the natives would mortgage their land and lose it all; and these advocate leasing it to them. Others are afraid that the native, if a landowner, would become too independent, would not be willing to go to the towns and large plantations and farms to work. Meanwhile the native is crying out for land of his own. In the past few years the government has been refusing to sell land to the natives where it has been offering the land to white settlers.

The education of the native has caused a great deal of discussion among many different classes of the whites in Natal. The various missionary societies have continued teaching those in their charge, regardless of the various comments. The government of the country has made grants in aid of the various schools, sufficient to pay the teachers, provided the missionary be responsible for the school and keep it up to the required standard. Most of the schools are taught by native teachers.

The opinion of the white population of Natal differs on the question of education as on other questions. Many are for not educating the native at all, believing that he is better in his ignorant heathen state. Other say to teach him to work but not to read. Others cry out against teaching him a trade for fear that he will come into competition with the white workmen. Most of those actively engaged in teaching the native, believe in taking him as far in study of all kinds as he is capable of going.

The native mind is inferior to the mind of the white man in some ways, though not in others. As a rule, the native is capable in the concrete, but fails in the abstract. He is a good linguist and speaker, but a poor mathematician. He is a good musician naturally, and a poor business man. He will make a good doctor, lawyer and minister, but will

probably not keep his accounts in order. He is a creature of impulse and emotion rather than of reason and judgment.

Education will correct some of his failings, but some it will not. The racial difference is deeper than the color of the skin, and we must take this into consideration in watching him advance into the place he is destined to occupy in the history of the world.

About 5 or 10 per cent of the children of Natal attend the day schools. The general trend of popular feelings seems to be rather in the direction of giving all the Zulus educational advantages and even requiring the parents to send the children to school. But we are still a long way from that goal.

The mission boarding schools take the native young to about the point where they would enter high school in this country. In some cases they are carried further in their studies. Some of the Zulu youth have gone to England or have come to America and taken their degrees in the arts and sciences, theology and medicine and law. These few have shown what the Zulu mind is capable of. It is a favorite saying with some that we must allow many generations before we can expect satisfactory results in our education of the Zulu. There are many cases which would go to indicate that if we take a Zulu youth and give him the same advantages educationally that we give the white boy, beginning at the same age, the white boy will find it hard, in certain lines, to keep ahead of his black brother.

One of the greatest obstacles to the advancement of the Zulu in education and Christianization, is polygamy. The government has never interfered with this institution, but even seems sometimes to rather favor it among the heathen. The only obstacle placed in the way of polygamy is the regulation that, in case a man is married by Christian ceremony, he is not allowed to take more than one wife. Most of the missionary societies do not allow polygamy among the members of their church. The reasons for this are obvious.

There are many practical objections to the immediate

abolition of polygamy. The chief objection is its difficulty. Practically all the Zulus have a plurality of wives, at least among the older and wealthier men. These wives have all been paid for, the price being about \$500 each. It would probably cause a rebellion if polygamy were effectively abolished at once. As yet the government has taken no steps to even discourage it. This might be easily done by putting an extra heavy tax on wives subsequent to the first, or by other measures of a similar nature. It seems probable that as the people are educated and Christianized, polygamy will decrease and die out, but that time is not yet.

The Zulu chief is still very much in evidence, and, though his power is less than formerly, he still has great influence with the people. To many it has seemed advisable to curtail his power and eventually abolish the tribal institutions. Such was the recommendation of the last commission appointed by the government to investigate native affairs. Such an endeavor must be entered into with caution and carried out with great tact. However, such a course is still in the stage of speculation and discussion.

The Natal government has always forbidden the sale of intoxicating liquors to the natives. This has been a wise and cautious measure. The native cannot drink liquor in moderation and he would be a danger to the country at large when drunken.

There is a section of the white population which advocates allowing the native to have liquor without restraint, and there has been some agitation to have the Cape Colony wines admitted and sold freely to the natives, so as to enable the farmers of the Cape to have a market for their wine. We hope that such agitation will not succeed, but sometimes it seems likely that it will.

The labor laws affecting the native have caused a good deal of dissatisfaction, as have also the pass laws and a great many other laws which are intended to regulate his every step when he has once left his own kraal. As a rule, in these laws, there is no glaring injustice, but the constant irritation of being arrested for some trifling indiscretion or

mistake, and sometimes imprisoned or whipped for such offense, is very galling. The native rebellion of 1906 was probably caused more by the accumulated irritation of a long series of pin-pricks than by any definite act of injustice on the part of the government, though the poll tax appeared to be the immediate cause.

It is generally recognized by the white population of Natal that the laws regulating the lives and actions of the natives, are sadly in need of revision and correction. The difficulty comes in not knowing what laws to change and how to change them. As a rule, no two men agree; and a just and satisfactory revision of the native code seems a long way off.

Pending the proposed union of all the British colonies in South Africa the Natal Government deferred taking any action in regard to native affairs. It is hoped that the administration of native affairs will be more satisfactory under the Union Government of all South Africa.

The religion of the Zulus has always been very primitive. They have had an indistinct belief in Nkulunkulu the Great, Great Spirit. They also have vague beliefs that the spirits of their ancestors continue to live after death and oftentimes come to help or trouble them. They have very definite beliefs in a great many evil and mischievous sprites and goblins who are capable of all sorts of tricks and misdemeanors. Their belief in witchcraft is more than an indistinct belief. It is to them a distinct knowledge, though probably the ideas of all Zulus on the subject differ, depending on the personal experiences of each one. This belief in witchcraft governs and supports many wicked and immoral and heathenish customs. Their superstitions have always been a great obstacle in the way of Christianity, and enlightenment. It was only after ten years of preaching that the first native professed conversion, sixty-five years ago. At present there are a large number of Christians, a larger number of nominal Christians, and a still larger number of those who have been more or less influenced by the work of the missionaries. Roughly speaking I would estimate that about 10 per cent of the natives have been markedly

influenced by Christianity. But only a fraction of this number are known as Christians. And a still smaller proportion deserve the name.

The adult Zulu who has grown up to manhood in heathenism often becomes converted, but he retains more or less of his superstitious beliefs, and it is difficult for him to grasp the true spirit of Christianity. Among such there are many cases of back-sliding.

Among the educated Zulus the proportion of Christians is large, comparatively few, boys or girls, going through our boarding schools without becoming Christians. There are many discouraging cases of back-sliding among these also, but not so many as among the totally ignorant kraal Christians. But among our Christians there are many bright and shining examples, of strong and steadfast faith and living.

Nearly a hundred years ago the Zulu, under the despotic Chaka, conquered practically all southeastern Africa. His prestige as a warrior still remains, and few of the other races of Africa care to provoke a Zulu. A natural leader of men, a bold and fearless pioneer, and an enthusiastic and capable preacher and evangelist when he has once comprehended the spirit of Christ, his missionary, looks on the Zulu as the hope of all southern Africa, carrying the gospel where once he carried fire and the sword.